

VICTORY VILLA COMMUNITY CENTER
404 Compass Road
Middle River
Baltimore County
Maryland

HABS MD-1218
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
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VICTORY VILLA COMMUNITY CENTER

HABS No. MD-1218

Location: 404 Compass Road, Middle River, Baltimore County, Maryland

Significance: Victory Villa Community Center was built during World War II to serve the nearby defense worker neighborhoods of Victory Villa and Aero Acres. Many Victory Villa residents worked at the Glenn L. Martin Aircraft Company plants in Middle River.

Description: Victory Villa Community Center is a remarkable surviving example of a government-sponsored wartime community building using Modern design details. It is prominently sited at the corner of Martin Boulevard and Compass Road on the south edge of the Victory Villa subdivision and across Martin Boulevard from the Aero Acres subdivision. It was grouped near a kindergarten building, administration building, and small commercial structures that reflected the careful planning of community amenities for this defense worker boom town.

Victory Villa Community Center is visually divided into two sections – a two-story gymnasium/auditorium with a slightly arched roof and a perpendicular one-story wing housing offices and meeting rooms. It has a plain, Modern appearance created by the use of prefabricated rectangular siding panels and industrial metal sash windows. The 1948 Sanborn Fire Insurance map for Middle River indicates that the community center is wood post construction, undoubtedly due to wartime restrictions on structural metal.

The interior of the community center is still remarkably intact, with original wood doors and composite panel walls. The square vinyl tile floors are probably very similar to the original Linoleum. The stage is still intact in the auditorium/gymnasium, although there is now a drop ceiling between the first and second story levels that indicates that this space has recently been used more as a multipurpose room than a true gymnasium.

History: Although somewhat altered and under redevelopment pressure, Middle River offers an outstanding collection of World War II-era national defense resources in its buildings, land-use patterns, and community institutions. Between 1939 and 1943, the number of employees at the Glenn L. Martin Company airplane manufacturing facilities in Middle River, Maryland mushroomed from 3,000 to 52,000. The small town of Middle River, with 161 residents in 1939, was

unprepared and unequipped to house the massive influx of newcomers needed to man the defense production effort.¹

The Martin Company started the expansion of residential facilities for its workers in Middle River even before the United States entered the conflict. Then the company called on the Federal government to continue these efforts. Lanham Act funds were used to develop temporary and permanent housing for defense workers in Middle River – the permanent housing neighborhoods were Aero Acres, Stansbury Estates, and Victory Villa. In 1941, the Maryland State Planning Commission hired Hale Walker, planner for Greenbelt, and Irving C. Root of the National Park Service to prepare a master plan for Middle River. Their plan incorporated many garden city features already started by the Martin Company housing – pedestrian paths to playgrounds and schools, curving residential streets separate from the new dual highways of Martin and Eastern Boulevards, and neighborhood strip shopping centers. At first the government provided trailers for workers near the factory, but then during 1942, 1,100 prefabricated plywood houses were built in the new neighborhood of Victory Villa by the Farm Security Administration.²

The project included a school and community center for Victory Villa. The Victory Villa community center was intended to help build community identity for a large population of immigrants from backgrounds as varied as Northern cities and rural Appalachia. The community center included a “gymnasium for sports and dances and meeting rooms that housed classes and child care and served as incubators for new churches and other civic organizations.”³ Another building next door served as a kindergarten.

Sources: Jack Breihan, “Necessary Visions: Community Planning in Wartime,” *Maryland Humanities* 71 (November 1998): 11-14.

Isabelle Gournay et. al. “Modern Movement in Maryland – Context Essay,” Draft (December 2002).

Sanborn Map Company, Middle River, Maryland. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1948.

Historian: Lisa Pfueller Davidson, 2006

¹ Jack Breihan, “Necessary Visions: Community Planning in Wartime,” *Maryland Humanities* 71 (November 1998): 11.

² Breihan, 12-13.

³ Breihan, 13.

Project

Information: This short form history was prepared to supplement photographic documentation of World War II-era resources in Middle River. During 2004-05 HABS staff photographer James Rosenthal photographed a series of sites in Baltimore City and County in preparation for the *Buildings of Maryland* publication. Maryland Historical Trust sponsored the photography project and is producing *Buildings of Maryland* as part of the Society of Architectural Historians' *Buildings of the United States* series.